

## **Interim COVID-19 guidance for schools: Management of known and possible COVID-19 cases**

This guidance is intended for schools to plan their response to known and possible cases of COVID-19 as well as known contacts. This is based on what is currently known about COVID-19 and will be updated as more information and guidance becomes available. (*Information updated since last guidance provided in italics*).

### **Students or staff with symptoms of COVID-19 (but no known exposures to someone contagious with COVID-19)**

Students and staff should be excluded from school if they have any of the following with or without fever:

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing -or -
- Loss of taste or smell -or –
- New or worsening cough

If these symptoms are explainable by an underlying condition (such as shortness of breath for an individual with asthma) exclusion may not be necessary.

This is not a complete list of all symptoms of COVID-19, but only those that should trigger an automatic exclusion and evaluation for COVID-19. Other symptoms may include: fever, chills, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea/vomiting, or diarrhea. Many COVID-19 cases show no symptoms at all, and a person is able to spread the virus up to two (2) days before they have any symptoms. Given the overlap of these symptoms with other more common illnesses and the lack of symptoms in many cases, it is not possible to identify and exclude all cases of COVID-19 through [screening of symptoms](#). Careful [preventive actions](#) within the school are needed to reduce the chances of spread.

Schools should plan to have a room identified to isolate students or staff with symptoms of COVID-19 identified during the school day.

- Students and staff should be moved safely, respectfully, as well as in accordance with any applicable privacy laws or regulations, to the isolation room for evaluation. The individual should be provided a mask if they are able to use one, and students should be supervised by a staff member who maintains at least six feet of distance and uses appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) if available.
- School nurses and other healthcare providers should use [Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions](#) when caring for sick people. See: What Healthcare

Personnel Should Know About [Caring for Patients with Confirmed or Possible COVID19 Infection](#).

## Return to school

- Advise sick staff members and children not to return until they have met criteria for return.
- Students or staff excluded for these symptoms can return if:
  - They either test negative for COVID-19 using an antigen test or PCR test (mouth or nose swab or saliva test) or similar test that directly detects the virus  
- or -
  - A medical evaluation determines that their symptoms were more likely due to another cause (e.g. asthma exacerbation, strep throat, etc.). In this latter case, the individual can return when they meet criteria for that condition. *A doctor's note should be provided that asserts the individual is clear to return to school based on a more likely diagnosis that requires no further exclusion or states the return criteria based on some other exclusion.*  
- or -
  - Students or staff with the above excludable symptoms who do not have a negative antigen, PCR or similar test or do not have a more likely cause for their symptoms, must complete the current isolation criteria for COVID-19 to return to school.
- Current **isolation criteria** for COVID-19 (*for those who test positive for the COVID-19 virus or have excludable symptoms but no testing or more likely cause*):
  - Students and staff who test positive for COVID-19 (PCR or antigen test) and persons with symptoms of COVID-19 (see list above) who do not get tested, should isolate until:
    - Ten (10) days\* have passed since symptoms started - and -
    - Twenty-four (24) hours have passed since last fever without taking medicine to reduce fever - and -
    - Overall improvement in symptoms.
  - Those who test positive by an antigen, PCR (mouth or throat swab) or similar viral test but do not have symptoms will be required to stay out of school until ten (10) days\* after the specimen was collected.
    - \*Note: some people may be required to extend the isolation period to twenty (20) days. Their doctor will need to determine if this is necessary.
  - The criteria above should be used to determine eligibility to return to school. Negative PCR test results are not required nor recommended after meeting these criteria.
  - *Recommendations around antigen testing are changing as more is learned about these tests. Schools implementing their own antigen testing in the facility should follow that guidance. They should plan to exclude students or staff who test positive and end COVID-19 exclusion for those who test negative regardless of who does the testing. There are cases where*

*confirmatory PCR may be recommended, and guidance has been provided to healthcare providers (<https://scdhec.gov/covid19/guidance-antigen-testing>). If a healthcare provider believes confirmatory testing may be indicated and determines an initial positive antigen likely represents a false positive, a return to school note may be requested from the provider to end COVID-19 exclusion.*

## Testing

A student or staff member who develops symptoms of COVID-19 but does not get tested could limit DHEC's ability to appropriately respond to new cases and ensure the health and safety of other students and staff. An antigen test, PCR test (nose or throat swab or saliva) or similar tests that directly detect the virus is required as there is delay in developing detectable antibodies. A negative antibody test is insufficient to rule out a new infection.

*Schools that are utilizing school-based testing should refer to that guidance. Testing can also be done by a healthcare provider or at a DHEC testing site.*

- Location of testing sites is available on the DHEC website: <https://scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-screening-testing-sites>

It is recommended that close contacts of cases who have no symptoms be tested but no sooner than seven (7) days after first contact with the individual with COVID-19 while they were contagious (usually about seven (7) days into their quarantine period). This testing is not a requirement for return but should be encouraged. Those who are close contacts to a known COVID-19 case and develop symptoms for which they should be excluded should be tested as soon as possible. If these individuals do not get tested, they must follow the guidance above to return to school based on their symptoms and also ensure they complete their initial 14-day quarantine period, whichever is longer.

For example, a student's quarantine period is set to expire on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month. However, they also developed symptoms on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and did not get tested, which requires them to isolate until the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month. They may not return to school until after the 13<sup>th</sup>.

## Cases in classroom

If a student or staff member tests positive, they could have been contagious with the virus up to 48 hours before their symptoms began or before their test specimen was collected (for those with no symptoms).

- Prevention - Routinely using these precautions will help avoid the need to quarantine all classroom contacts of persons with COVID-19:
  - It is essential that staff ensure maximum distancing between students and other staff while in the classroom and throughout the day to limit the possibility of transmission.
  - Masks should be used as directed among students and staff.
  - CDC provides [toolkits for K-12 schools](#) for prevention planning.
- Anyone known to be a **close contact** (*defined as being within six (6) feet for a cumulative fifteen (15) minutes or more within a 24 hour period*) to a known COVID-19 case while the case is contagious must be excluded from school for fourteen (14) days after last contact with the person with COVID-19.

- People who have recovered from a confirmed illness [*PCR test (nose or throat swab test or saliva test) or antigen swab test*] in the past three (3) months will not need to quarantine after a close contact with someone with COVID-19. See “Quarantine” below.
- For any classrooms where social distancing could not be maintained (classes with young children who do not have assigned seating throughout the day), all children and staff must be considered close contacts and must complete a fourteen (14) day quarantine period.
- Students and teachers in a classroom with a known COVID-19 case in which social distancing was reliably maintained should remain together in the same cohort to the extent that is possible. They should receive screening for fever and symptoms (see above) each morning until 14 days after last contact with the case. Note: anyone determined to be a “close contact” must be excluded.
  - Any of these students or teachers who are monitored and found to have symptoms of COVID-19 should be sent home and excluded and will be required to get tested or complete the required isolation and initial quarantine period to return to school.
- *Plexiglass barriers: In scenarios in which students are seated closer apart than six (6) feet, the students would not be considered close contacts when:*
  1. *appropriate plexiglass is utilized, and*
  2. *distance between students is at least three (3) feet apart, and*
  3. *the students are wearing cloth face coverings or face masks that cover the nose and mouth (the plexiglass does not serve as a substitute to mask-wearing).*
- *Plexiglass is considered appropriately sized and utilized if it surrounds three sides (the front and two sides) of the edges of the student’s desk and extends at least a foot above each child’s head when seated at the desk and at least a foot beyond the end of the desk on either side.*
- *There may be acceptable other configurations based on classroom setup. Schools should measure the distance with individuals occupying the seats to ensure students will be at least three (3) feet apart when seated and that the barrier will provide appropriate separation during school activities. If it is not possible to cover a side with plexiglass, schools can prevent individuals from being considered close contacts by ensuring the seating arrangement provides at least six (6) feet of distance on the exposed side.*
- If 3 or more COVID-19 cases are identified within a *classroom or other cohort of students (e.g. sports team or extracurricular group)* within fourteen (14) days of each other, consideration should be given to excluding all students and staff in the classroom (or cohort of students) for fourteen (14) days after contact with the last identified COVID-19 case.
- The classroom (or room used by the cohort of students) will need to be closed for [cleaning and disinfection](#) before use again.

## **Reporting cases and close contacts**

If a school determines that a student or staff member was contagious with COVID-19 while on campus, DHEC requests that these individuals be reported to the appropriate regional DHEC office by phone within 24 hours. DHEC will also notify schools of any reported cases that may have been contagious while on campus. All close contacts at the school will need to be identified and reported to DHEC. This will include everyone the ill individual would have been within *six (6) feet of for a cumulative fifteen (15) minutes or more within a 24 hours period, except in the case where appropriate precautions involving plexiglass barriers were used as noted above.*

The following information is requested when reporting a COVID-19 case:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Address
- Whether they are a student or staff member
- Contact information – phone number for staff or parent/guardian name and phone number for students
- Location and date of test, if known

The following information is requested for persons identified as Close Contacts to COVID-19 cases:

- Name and date of birth
- Whether they are a student or staff member
- Contact information - phone number for staff or parent/guardian name and phone number for students
- Dates that they were in contact with the contagious individual

## **Quarantine**

Some students or staff may have been told they were a close contact to a known (confirmed/probable) case of COVID-19 and have to complete a quarantine period. *This means they are required to be excluded from school and stay home so they do not risk exposing others to COVID-19 if they become sick. For students or staff identified as close contacts, DHEC staff will work with schools to provide information on when the quarantine period for these individuals will end.* [CDC](#) provides guidance on appropriately counting the quarantine period for different scenarios.

- Household contact: If the child or staff member lives in the same household as a known case, they will have to quarantine an additional fourteen (14) days after the date their household member has been cleared from their isolation period ([Scenario 4](#)).
- Other close contact: If a child or staff member has been told they are a close contact to a known case of COVID-19, they will need to quarantine until 14 days after the last contact with the case ([Scenario 1](#)). If they have an additional close contact during their quarantine period (such as another household member gets sick), they must begin another 14 day quarantine period beginning when the contact occurred ([Scenario 2](#)).
- Other household member in quarantine: If the child or staff member lives in the same household as someone in quarantine, they will not need to quarantine themselves. If the household member in quarantine is later determined to have COVID-19, the child or staff member may be recommended for quarantine if they were in close contact during that person's infectious period.

- Those with COVID-19 who recovered: If a student or staff member is a lab confirmed case of COVID-19 by antigen or PCR (nose or throat swab or saliva test), they do not need to quarantine again after close contact to someone with COVID-19 in the first three (3) months after recovering but will for any close contact that happens after that three (3) month period.
  - The person must provide either a note from a healthcare provider that they had the positive lab result (via antigen or PCR test) in the past three (3) months or provide a paper or electronic copy of the results (SARS-CoV-2 RNA – Detected or Positive)
  - Positive antibody results (SARS-CoV-2 IgG or IgM) or any other lab test is not sufficient to meet these criteria to defer quarantine. They must quarantine according to the current guidelines.
- Staff working while in quarantine: To limit the chances of COVID-19 spread in the facility, staff should plan to quarantine at home and not return to work after close contact to someone contagious with COVID-19. However, school staff could be considered critical infrastructure workers and thus may be permitted to work if a replacement is not available and as long as they follow the precautions outlined in the links below. It is recommended that schools notify parents and guardians that this approach is being used to allow staff to return to work.
  - These employees must wear a mask at all times while in the school, monitor for symptoms daily and throughout the day, practice social distancing to the extent possible, practice good hand hygiene, and clean frequently touched surfaces often. Review links below for specific guidelines. These employees should avoid working with children and staff with medical conditions that may put them at risk for severe illness. Those unable to follow the outlined precautions should not plan to return to work until completing their quarantine period.
  - Employees allowed to work during their quarantine period should continue to quarantine at home when they are not at work and avoid public settings.
  - If these employees have any of the symptoms listed above, they must not go to work at school or must separate themselves from others and leave the school immediately. They should not plan to return until they meet "Return to School" criteria above.
  - Links to guidance for critical infrastructure workers:
    - [https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USDHS/2020/04/09/file\\_attachments/1423331/DC\\_CISA\\_Interim\\_Guidance\\_Critical\\_Workers\\_Safety\\_Practices\\_COVID19.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USDHS/2020/04/09/file_attachments/1423331/DC_CISA_Interim_Guidance_Critical_Workers_Safety_Practices_COVID19.pdf)
    - [https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USDHS/2020/04/09/file\\_attachments/1423330/DC\\_CISA\\_Flyer\\_Essential\\_Critical\\_Workers\\_Dos\\_and\\_Donts\\_COVID19.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USDHS/2020/04/09/file_attachments/1423330/DC_CISA_Flyer_Essential_Critical_Workers_Dos_and_Donts_COVID19.pdf)